



**Re: H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.**

Testimony of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Connecticut  
By Thomas Burr  
Appropriations Committee  
February 23, 2022

Senator Abercrombie, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee; my name is Thomas Burr, from Glastonbury CT, and I the Community and Affiliates Relations Manager of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Connecticut). I am testifying today regarding H.B. No. 5037 – An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023.

NAMI is dedicated to building better lives for those with lived experience with mental health illness and their families. NAMI Connecticut and its nine local affiliates provide support groups and educational programs for people with mental health conditions and their loved ones and advocates for policies to improve the lives of people affected by mental health conditions.

I am the parent of an adult child who is in recovery from bipolar disorder, after 8 years' worth of repeated hospitalizations, incarcerations, and homelessness. Some of the best care he received during his illness occurred right here in Hartford, at the Capital Region Mental Health Center. These were services provided by DMHAS and funded by the State of CT via Husky. My son is now in recovery, living on his own with his wife and daughter, owns his own business; and has been doing very well for the past 15 years!

As you already know, COVID-19 has had, and continues to have a serious impact on the overall mental health of people in Connecticut. The pandemic highlighted the existing mental health crisis in the state and around the country. As a staff member of NAMI Connecticut, I care about mental health for all. We have seen our call volume double during the pandemic and the demand for our online support groups and education programs continues to increase.

The Connecticut nonprofit service provider community, including NAMI Connecticut and the organizations where NAMI refers people with mental health issues and their loved ones for help, struggle to meet the demand for services after years of cuts and austerity. The time to re-invest is NOW!

We gratefully acknowledge the Governor's proposed budget as outlined in HB 5037 includes approximately \$160 million in mental health related items, primarily to strengthen mobile crisis, inpatient, and crisis care. It will support children and adults in crisis, and we particularly

appreciate the inclusion of peer supports in emergency rooms. However, we feel the following items should also be included:

- \$250K towards accelerating the rollout of NAMI's Ending the Silence educational program into CT's Middle and High Schools, to help both students and teachers to recognize mental health struggles and know how to seek help. Information on the "Ending the Silence" program can be found by visiting: <https://www.nami.org/Support-Education/Mental-Health-Education/NAMI-Ending-the-Silence>
- \$7.5 million for Peer-run Respite, as proposed by the Peer-run Respite Workgroup (Advocacy Unlimited, The Hub, the Keep the Promise Coalition, NAMI CT, and Recovery Innovations for Pursuing Peer Leadership and Empowerment), as an effective crisis-stabilization alternative to hospitalization. Information on Peer-run Respite can be found by visiting: <https://namict.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Peer-Run-Respite-One-Pager.pdf>
- Support for the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance long-term plan to restore at least \$461 million to community nonprofits—including housing and homeless service organizations--which have been underfunded for far too long.
- Fully fund the recommended roll-out of the CT 988 Planning Coalition, to improve and strengthen the state's mental health crisis response system.
- \$13.34 million\* in FY 23 to provide homeless and housing service organizations funding for adequate wages, benefits, and professional development for front line workers, increasing rent and utility costs, and better access to technology.
- \$2.3 million\* in DOH's Housing/Homeless Services line to provide critical staff infrastructure support to Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) and 2-1-1.
- Increase DMHAS Housing Supports and Service line by \$2.25 million\* in FY23 to expand supportive services to 300 scattered site and development units for highly vulnerable individuals and families with persistent obstacles to maintaining housing stability.
- Preserve the existing \$23.404 million\* Housing Supports and Services line item.

\*As proposed by the Reaching Home Campaign. Note that we also support the items that the RHC propose for the CT Dept. of Housing. The Reaching Home Campaigns legislative priorities can be found by visiting: [https://www.psychousing.org/sites/default/files/2022%20Reaching%20Home%20Legislative%20Agenda%202022.02.09%20\(1\)%20\(1\)%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.psychousing.org/sites/default/files/2022%20Reaching%20Home%20Legislative%20Agenda%202022.02.09%20(1)%20(1)%20(1).pdf)

Including the items above will go a long way in creating a more robust and seamless mental health care network for all of Connecticut's citizens.



At the same time, it is important to recognize we arrived at this point because Connecticut lacks a vision and long-term comprehensive plan for the mental health of our residents. We have multiple state agencies providing services to different subpopulations, yet insufficient coordination among them. There is no statewide investment in mental health promotion and awareness or in primary prevention. There are radical differences in what individuals in the public and private sectors can access. It is time for a statewide, multi-sector planning effort to create a long-term mental health plan, with input from all stakeholder groups and particularly from the individuals and families most affected. As part of the urgent attempt to address the crisis we are in, please consider including funding for a comprehensive planning effort—if not this year, then next.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully

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